INL Briefs Congress on Progress of the Next Generation Nuclear Plant

INL's Phil Hildebrandt (middle) discusses the NGNP's ability to produce hydrogen as a next generation fuel source.

On Wednesday, Sept. 20, Congress held the latest in a series of hearings on the Next Generation Nuclear Plant (NGNP) project. Phil Hildebrandt of Idaho National Laboratory testified at the U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on the Next Generation Nuclear Plant hearing, which highlighted INL's leading role in the design and R&D activities related to NGNP, along with INL's role in the development of a public-private alliance to ensure the long-term commercial success of the project.

The subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Darrell Issa of California, had previously requested the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) to prepare a report on approaches to ensure the commercial viability of NGNP and DOE's progress meeting the NGNP schedule outlined in the 2005 Energy Policy Act. The hearing was convened to discuss the findings of the GAO report.

Issa's opening comments emphasized the importance of nuclear programs such as the NGNP.

"Nuclear Power is enjoying a global resurgence because of its environmental benefits and the expected growth in demand for electricity. In the U.S., there is also interest in building new plants because the current fleet of reactors is aging and electricity demand is projected to rise 40 to 50 percent by 2030.

"The Next Generation Nuclear Plant is part of a federal government effort to advance commercial nuclear reactor designs beyond the current generation that is being deployed around the world. Additionally, the NGNP is a key component in the Administration's plans to develop the 'hydrogen economy.' An important purpose of the advanced nuclear demonstration plant is to produce hydrogen on a large scale."

During his testimony, INL's Phil Hildebrandt provided a similar message.

"I am encouraged by the recent resurgence in interest in nuclear technologies by the U.S. commercial power generating industry as indicated by announced plans to seek licenses from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to construct and operate new nuclear plants," said Hildebrandt. "The Idaho National Laboratory, under the leadership of its director, John Grossenbacher (vice admiral, U.S. Navy, retired), is playing a central role in this nuclear renaissance and in the future of nuclear energy, including the Next Generation Nuclear Plant and the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership."

"Over the next ten years, the Idaho National Laboratory is envisioned by the Department of Energy to become the pre-eminent, internationally-recognized nuclear energy research, development and demonstration laboratory. The Idaho National Laboratory will foster academic, industry, government and international collaborations to produce the investment, programs and expertise to ensure this vision. To this end, the Idaho National Laboratory is today forming collaborations with other U.S. national laboratories and commercial industry for development and demonstration projects such as the Next Generation Nuclear Plant, drawing on the existing core of talented and experienced personnel and the capabilities of unique facilities such as the Advanced Test Reactor.

"The subject of today's hearing, the Next Generation Nuclear Plant, is an essential part of the future of nuclear energy. The demonstrated success of the commercial power industry in reliably producing electric power using existing nuclear technology in the U.S. and throughout the world provides the foundation upon which these improved nuclear technologies can be extended into energy sectors that were previously not directly served by nuclear energy."

The goal of the Next Generation Nuclear Plant is to build a new Very High Temperature Reactor (VHTR) ready for operation by 2021. In addition to providing power, the reactor will create a bridge to the hydrogen fuel economy by allowing large-scale, emissions-free, economical production of hydrogen.

Phil Hildebrandt's entire testimony. (33kB PDF)

Congressman Issa's opening statement about NGNP. (168kB PDF)

General Contact:
Communications,

Feature Archive